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of George Eliot

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THE ETHICAL TEACHINGS OF GEORGE ELIOT

BY

BERTHA LOFTIN EMPEY, A. B., BUTLER COLLEGE, 1906

**THESIS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS
IN ENGLISH**

**IN THE
GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE
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THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

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IS APPROVED BY ME AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF Master of Arts

Daniel Kilham Dodge

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT OF English

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THE ETHICAL TEACHINGS OF GEORGE ELIOT.

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The Ethical Teachings of George Eliot.

In reading the letters and journals of George Eliot, one is impressed with the value she places upon the ethical, rather than the artistic merit of her books. Time and time again, she declared that her books were written for the great public out of her deepest beliefs. "My predominant feeling is," she says in a letter to Mr. Richard Hutton, "not that I have achieved anything, but that great, great facts have struggled to find a voice through me and have only been able to speak brokenly." She felt that her duty to mankind was to write honestly and religiously what came from her inward promptings. "My books are deeply serious things to me, and come out of all the painful discipline, all the most hardly learnt lessons of my past life." Because æsthetic teaching deals with the highest complexity of human life, she considered it the best of all forms. Didactic fiction, it is true, is exceedingly popular with the great mass of moderately intelligent readers, and it is fortunate that a master of literature such as George Eliot, should have championed it. Opinions are divided on the question of using the novel for the purpose of teaching, but whether it mars the artistic effect or adds to its value, must always be a matter of personal preference. It concerns us to find what doctrines this author has embodied in her stories, and what great truths she strove to utter.

Throughout all ages great minds have struggled with the questions of life, and consciously or unconsciously, have given their conception of its meaning. With the growth of the scientific spirit, and the quickening in all lines of activity through the nineteenth

century, came from the shattering of many ideals which humanity had cherished during hundreds of years. Philosophers, poets, and men of genius voiced sentiments of doubt. Conditions caused some to despair, others to reason out a way of salvation. One class of thinkers, of which Matthew Arnold was a representative, bewildered by the clash of faith and knowledge, and unable to reconcile them, believed merely in a stoic resignation to the inevitable. Others, as Rossetti and Morris, abandoning themselves to rapturous dreams of a mystic world, evaded these perplexing questions. Tennyson found consolation in his belief of the existence of a Divine Being on whom he relied, not by any proof but by faith alone. Browning argued that the inadequacy of this life was a proof of one hereafter. A perfect immortality would be the reward to those who cheerfully and vigorously urge themselves to a spiritual development. Carlyle viewed this world as a symbol of the spiritual world, and men the manifestation of a God. He preached an intense individualism and regeneration through the lives of great men, who will "stand upon things and not upon shows of things." Now, George Eliot sought consolation in making Humanity her deity, and rejecting a God, whom she deemed inconceivable. In the history of this woman, we find the influences of the age, the agnostic philosophy, scientific achievements and humanitarian impulses. She became the herald of the new religion of humanity, and voiced in fiction some of the leading ideas of Comte, Mill, Spencer and Darwin. She was an expression in artistic form, of the modern spirit of Positivism, with an ethical code as definite as those of Carlyle, Browning, or Tennyson.

As any literary artist writes largely out of personal experience, a true appreciation of his sentiments is gained only by

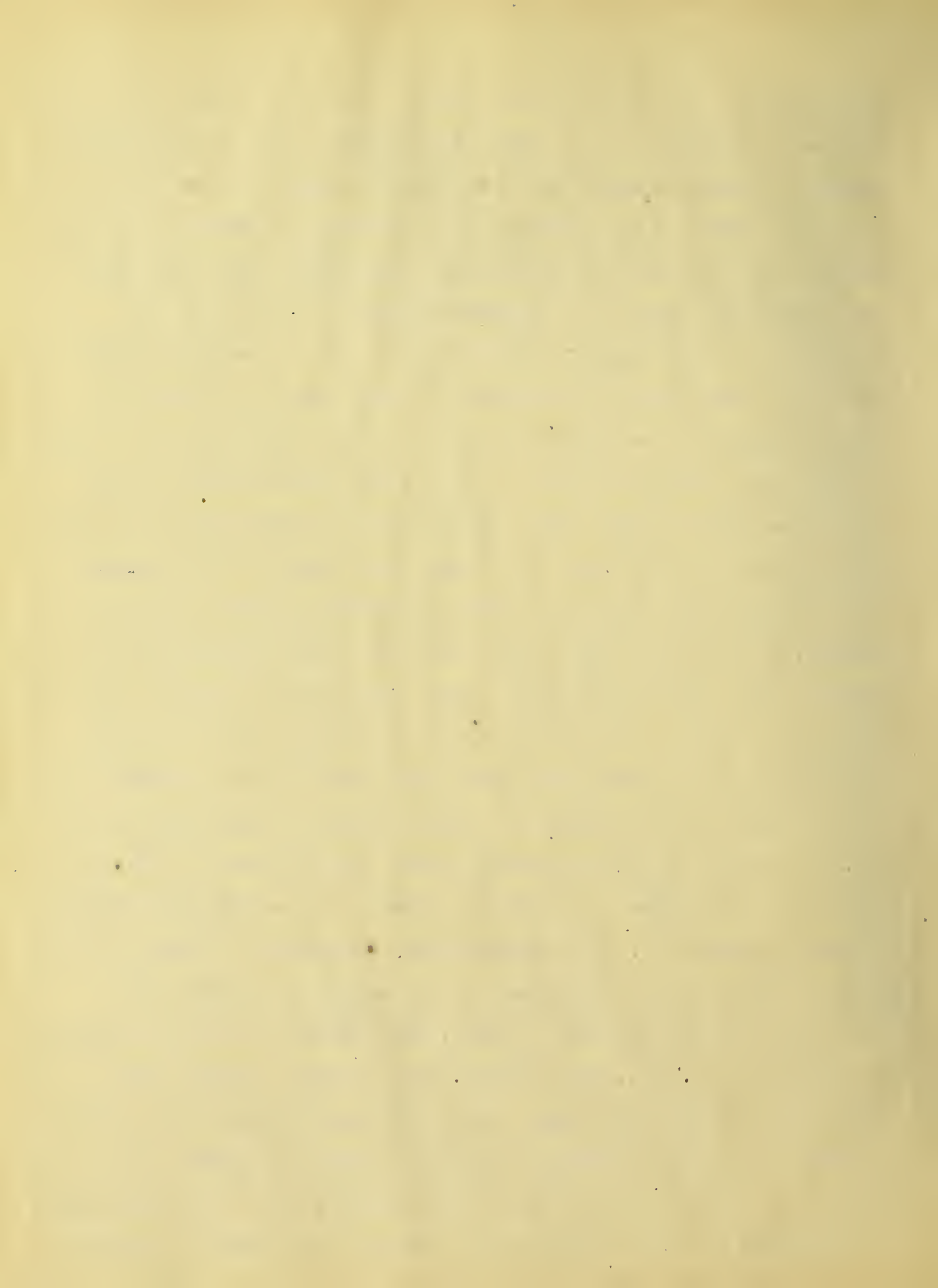
understanding his intellectual surroundings. Since George Eliot insisted on judging the individual by his environment and hereditary impulses, it is fair that the influences which shaped her own life and caused her to formulate her code of conduct, be examined. She was the daughter of a land agent of Warwickshire, a man who belonged to the Established Church, and gave unquestioning obedience to the forms and ritual. Her aunts, however, had revolted to the Methodists one of them, Mrs. Elizabeth Evans, (the model for Dinah Morris in Adam Bede,) had become a zealous preacher. As a young girl, George Eliot possessed very firm convictions about religion. She was a fervent believer, and strongly under the influence of Evangelicalism. She was considered a very pious young woman, who devoted herself to the church with great ardor. As a result of her studies, and interest in religious subjects, she began to grow away slowly from her old beliefs, and to become sceptical of its forms. She could no longer trust in the dogmas of the church, yet she hesitated to make a decisive break with them. At last, she refused to attend services. Family dissension arose, her father was bitterly indignant. Finally she consented to keep up an outward observance, to maintain peace among the relatives. It was at this time when she was about twenty three years old, that she met with friends in Coventry, who sympathized with her changed religious attitude. With them she discussed these new ideas. Among these people was Charles Bray, a well known philosopher. To him is due the shaping of her opinions, and the directing her mind toward principles which she afterward maintained. He insisted that all truth comes out of our experience, that society is an organism, and that the soul lives hereafter only in the life of the race. Some relatives of Mrs. Bray's, Charles and Sara

Hennell, also exerted an influence upon her at this time. These people were rationalists, who rejected all supernaturalism, and believed only in the spiritual essence of Christianity. Religion, Miss Hennell considered, was simply man's tendency toward an explanation of the world. All these Free-Thinkers prepared George Eliot's mind for a reception of the doctrines of the Positivists. In eighteen hundred and fifty-one, she undertook an assistant editorship of that radical magazine, the Westminster Review. In this position, she met the scientific thinkers of England, such as John Stuart Mill\$, Herbert Spencer, John Morley and George Henry Lewes. She accepted freely some of their ideas, but rejected others. Her time now was spent in devotion to her studies along metaphysical lines and to her work. In the criticisms which she wrote in connection with her position on this magazine, she often expresses intolerance for dogmatic religions. With bitter sarcasm she attacks churchmen, who do not bring their religion down to practical, every day life. She seems to have been unhappy, because she had "self dissatisfaction and despair of achieving anything worth the doing," as she expressed herself in a letter to Mrs. Bray in eighteen hundred and fifty-four. While she did not become a Positivist in its full meaning, yet she derived the main ideas of her ethics from this system of thinking, and her books show its influence. Positivism teaches that no satisfactory inquiry can be made into the "ultimate causes and the inner essence of things." August Comte, its great exponent says-"the knowledge of laws is henceforth to take the place of the search after causes." This simply means that the laws which govern society should be worked out, and taken as a foundation for a better state of humanity. The foremost principle, Comte

considered, the reverence for Humanity. "Altruism, alone," he declares, "can enable us to live in the highest and truest sense." Feeling is to be the highest expression of human life, whose morality and unity is controlled by heredity. He believed in the evolution of mankind, and the growth of a higher social structure. This he asserted ^{could} be accomplished, by the enthusiastic devotion of individuals to the great cause. She believed that Comte was a great teacher, and accepted, in the main, his system of ethics, to take the place of her negativism. She particularly laid stress on his theory, that we should live for others, and not make our "personal comfort a standard of truth." Doubtless, George Eliot's belief in these ideas of Comte's, were largely due to her connection about this time with George Henry Lewes, who was an ardent admirer of the great French thinker. Mr. Lewes was a brilliant and versatile scholar, deeply interested in philosophy and psychology. He and George Eliot proved sympathetic and congenial comrades, being interested along the same lines. While they entertained many similar ideas, each exercised perfect freedom in their beliefs. He encouraged and guided her in a way, but did not force her to his convictions. In the end, we find her as a translator, critic, and philosopher of thirty-six years, combining all these various influences with the results of her own keen, independent intellect, and voicing in fiction a theory of life, interpreted from its practical and realistic side.

A striking feature of the ethical scheme which she demonstrates through the characters in her books, is a proof that life can be lived nobly without a personal God. She dispenses with him, making collective humanity her deity. "My books have for their

main bearing, a conclusion without which I could not have cared to write any representation of human life,—namely, that the fellowship between man and man, which has been the principle of development, social and moral is not dependent on conception of what is not man, and that the idea of God, so far as it has been a high spiritual influence is the ideal of a goodness entirely human (i.e. an exaltation of the human.)" Again she says— "It is really hideous to find that those who sit in the scribes' seat have got no further than the appeal to selfishness which they call God." Man is to find in altruism a substitute for religion. She believes that if men were freed from the idea that compensation is always found in the end, and that a Providence will repay, they would be more tender, each to the other, and would strive to perform a God's work for mankind. In the year of her union with Mr. Lewes she writes, "I begin to feel for other peoples' wants and sorrows a little more than I used to do. "Heaven help us" said the old religion! the new one from its very lack of that faith will teach us all the more to help one another." Her ideas of human life may be expressed in this way. Man enters the world strongly under the influence of heredity, his surroundings bias and limit his growth, yet experiences develop in him his character. This character may rise above its fate, if self seeking and desire for happiness be put aside, but unless the individual follows the path of duty, and renounces self for the sake of others, he is lost. "Our finest hope is finest memory." The immortality of the individual can exist only in being "the sweet presence of a good diffused," but "so to live, is heaven." Her ethical system sums itself up in the one word, Duty. She would make it the final law. She would reject, however, any absolute standard



for moral conduct, and insists that each individual be judged by his surroundings, and inherited impulses. It is his obligation, nevertheless, to do his duty under any circumstance. The religion, Humanity, imposes this unalterable law, regardless of personal consolation. The individual must sacrifice himself for the sake of the race. The lives of all men are so interwoven, that others must always suffer with the evil-doer. Actions are far reaching in their effects. "Our deeds", she says, "carry their terrible consequences quite apart from any fluctuations that went before, - consequences that are hardly ever confined to ourselves." Since she believes that "we prepare ourselves for sudden deeds by the reiterated choice of good or evil that determines character," we must renounce the indulgence of the present, to be true to "all the motives that sanctify our lives." Only by performing the act which will be best for others, making this an absolute Duty of life, may we reach the ideal which she held the greatest thing in life, - that of being to other souls "the cup of strength in some great agony." Yet, on the other hand, this law is also a necessity. Her idea of wages, is like the old Greek conception of Nemesis - a stern and relentless deity. For those who will not heed the inward voice, - the conscience, prompting self-renunciation, - retribution is inevitable. George Eliot takes the place of the Greek Chorus, commenting on every action and impulse of her character, and pronouncing the results to come. "Nemesis is lame," she declares, "but she is of colossal stature; ---- she stretches out her huge left arm and grasps her victim. The mighty hand is invisable, but the victim totters under the dire clutch." And again, "Consequences are unpitying." This retribution is just, in that no one can escape it,

but pitifully unjust, in that guiltless ones often suffer as much as the wrong-doer. Yet the individual is not entirely a victim of his Past, though it be irretrievable. The Future always has its path of Duty and a life spent in living for others will have a reward. In one of her letters to Mrs. Bray, March the eighteen, eighteen hundred and sixty-five, she writes "Life though a good to men on the whole, is a doubtful good to many, and to some not a good at all.---- To me, early death takes the aspect of salvation though I feel too, that those who live and suffer may sometimes have the greatest blessedness of being a salvation." Such is George Eliot's scheme of life,- "the blessedness of being a salvation,- the sacrifice of the individual for the ennobling of the race. It is the doctrine of the Cross for each person, but the Crown for the world.

The novels of George Eliot may be divided into two groups: those before, and including *Romola*, and those written afterward. In the first period, the books are written spontaneously from her own experiences, her ethics being brought out through the characters, principally. In the last period, each story grows denser with its philosophic weight of teaching, and is wrought from deliberate study. From teaching through the individual, she changed to preaching to the race. Her late books are consciously didactic. Indeed, the moral teaching has superceded the story, in her last work, *Theophrastus Such*, which is a sermon not a novel. It is the object of this paper to follow the author's ethics through each successive novel, dwelling especially on those in which the morals have not yet spoiled or detracted from the art. In her first stories,- ^{scenes} ~~seems~~ from *Clerical Life*, the ethical teaching is less

pointed than in her later novels . She allows the characters to demonstrate the moral of their actions. The people are suggested from her own childhood memories and associations. They are real men and women from ordinary life. They teach the lesson of self-sacrifice amidst homely surroundings and petty cares. In "The Sad Fortunes of the Reverent Amos Barton," the wife Milly drudges out her strength for their large family, regardless of her own happiness or joy. Here George Eliot especially emphasizes the pathos in the lives of the insignificant. By appealing to the reader's sympathy, she hopes to bring them closer in comparison to Mankind. As she says in a later book, "In this world there are so many of these common, coarse people, who have no picturesque sentimental wretchedness! It is so needful we should remember their existence, else we may happen to leave them quite out of our religion and philosophy, and frame lofty theories which only fit a world of extremes. There are few prophets in the world, few sublimely beautiful women, few heroes. I can't afford to give all my love and reverence to such rarities; I want a great deal of those feelings for my every-day fellow-men, especially for the few in the foreground of the great multitude whose faces I know, whose hands I touch, for whom I have to make way with kindly courtesy." Mr. Gilfil 's Love Story, is again a mute plea for fellow-feeling and tenderness.- The heartlessness of the world, with the agony of the individual, is drawn to show the pity of it. She says in speaking of Tina, who has been duped by a false lover,- "While this poor little heart was being bruised with a weight too heavy for it, Nature was holding on her calm inexorable way, in unmoved and terrible beauty. What were our little Tina and her trouble in this

mighty torrent, rushing from one awful unknown to another? Lighter than the smallest center of quivering life in the water-drop, hidden and uncared for as the pulse of anguish in the breast of the tiniest bud that has fluttered down to its nest with the long-sought food, and has found the nest torn and empty." The author is unconsciously paving the way for her doctrine of humanitarianism, by proving the need of the world for sympathy. In the last of her stories, "Janet's Repentance", the minister Mr. Tryan, is an example of a life given for others and its blessedness. His memorial remains in Janet Dempster whom he has "re-saved from self despair, strengthened with divine hopes, and now looking back on years of purity and helpful labor." Here the central idea of her ethics is expressed by the author when she declares, "the idea of Duty-----is to the moral life what the addition of a great central ganglion is to animal life." The casual reader might at first be impressed with the apparently conventional Christianity, which the agnostic writer is preaching. Here it may be well to note, that she is never antagonistic to Christianity in her novels. From her letters we learn that she had little sympathy with the Free-Thinkers, as a class. She insists that she has "too profound a conviction of the efficacy that lies in all sincere faith, and the spiritual blight that comes with no faith, to have any negative propagandism. "In this particular story, she is portraying the effect of a faith on the individual, and its value in redeeming character. It is the new Christianity, the religion of Humanity robed in the old symbols, which she is preaching. It is a creed devoid of a personal Saviour, yet teaching his commands.

Her first novel, "Adam Bede," does not seem possessed of a

conscious motive. The charm of the book lies in the naturalness and pathos of simple, homely lives. The author does not yet become convinced of her mission as a teacher, and the real interest of the story rests in the development of primitive natures under adverse influences. The ethical doctrine is shown by character contrast, - Dinah Morris and Adam Bede, with Hetty Sorrel and Arthur Donnithorne. Both girls are of the same half-educated farmer class, but Dinah represents its highest spiritual development, and Hetty its lowest. Dinah is first introduced preaching to the villagers, intent on winning them to redemption, while Hetty first appears triumphant over her success in gaining Arthur Donnithorne's admiration. Dinah Morris is portrayed as a high type of saintly womanhood. She devotes herself to the good of others, and chooses duty before personal preference. Hetty Sorrel, on the other hand, is depicted as a vain, shallow and foolish girl, who finally is snared through her ignorant ambition and childish egoism. Hers is the tragedy of self deceit. "Seeing nothing in this wide world but the little history of her own pleasures and pains" she is drawn to crime and misery through this selfishness. The sadness of it is, that this hard little nature under the blossom - like exterior, is incapable of acting other wise. She is fated to destruction. Arthur Donnithorne is drawn as a pleasure-loving yielding man, meaning no harm, but careless of actions and their effects, since he believes that he can always make amends by generosity. In contrast stands Adam Bede, a stalwart upright character, taking life with a high seriousness. The moral law of cause and effect - Nemesis - mercilessly follows up the wrong doing, caused by vanity and simple folly. The lives of Hetty and Arthur are wrecked, and no reparation

can amend the harm. But, with the portrayal of the affliction caused by selfishness and heedlessness, the author emphasizes the value of that "deep unspeakable suffering" which may well be called a baptism, a regeneration, the initiation into a new state." It shall be the means of changing selfish aims, to self-denying interest in mankind.

"The Mill on the Floss" is a record of a soul hampered by its inherited impulses, struggling ^{between} ~~with~~ duty and inclination. It is the autobiography of George Eliot herself, a chronicle of her spiritual conflicts. Maggie Tulliver, the heroine, is ^{of} a passionate, eager nature, constantly depressed by her deadly dull and commonplace life. The lack of harmony between herself and her surroundings, makes her bitter and rebellious. She wanted some explanation of this hard, real life;----"the little sordid tasks that filled the hours, or the more oppressive emptiness of weary, joyless leisure." Then she chances on a volume of Thomas A. Kempis' "Imitation of Christ". With a thrill she reads, "Know that the love of thyself doth hurt thee more than anything in the world,---- Forsake thyself, resign thyself, and thou shalt enjoy much inward peace." With enthusiasm, she received this solution of the wearisome problem of living,- by self renunciation, she tries to reach contentment and happiness. Yet she has not fully comprehended the entire meaning. Though she lives in an ecstasy of self-denial, the yearning for her own happiness, her craving for joy, could not yet be stifled. She does not understand that a sorrow must remain, and that "we can only tell it from pain by its being what we would choose before everything else, because our souls see it is good." Maggie has to be taught by suffering, that it is blessedness, not happiness, she

really desired. She meets Stephen Guest, to whom her cousin is betrothed. He seems to possess what Maggie has longed for- the things for which youth yearns. At first, she does not see her duty clearly, and she struggles between a moral obligation and her own desires. She drifts along undecided, half resisting, half yielding, but when the crucial moment comes, when she sees the right and the wrong distinctly, she cannot hesitate." Many things are difficult and dark to me," she says, "but I see one thing quite clearly - that I must not, cannot seek my own happiness by sacrificing others."

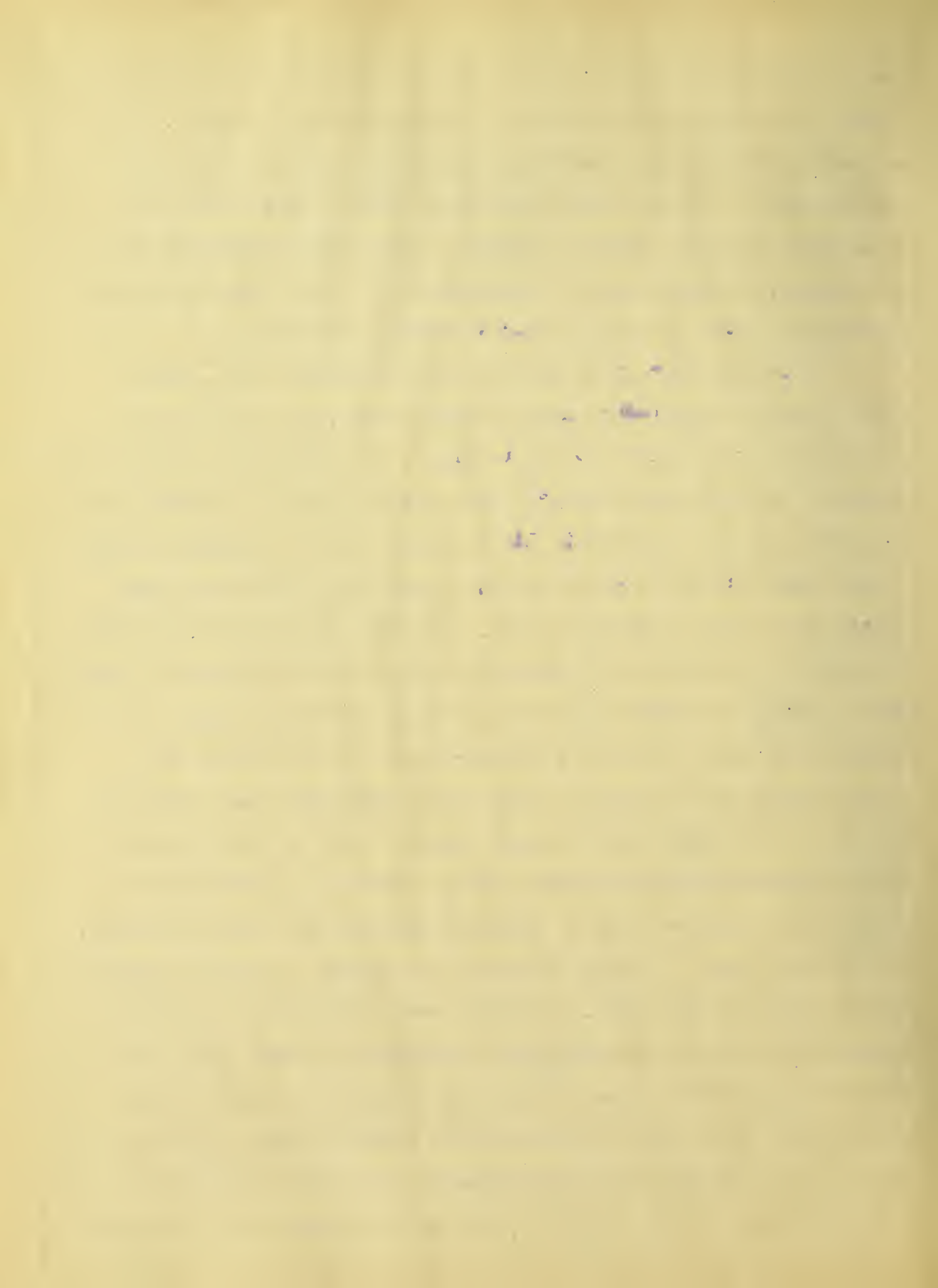
Through her sorrow Maggie learns "a secret of human tenderness and long-suffering." She knows then the true meaning of the words from that little old book of Thomas à Kempis. "I have received the Cross, I have received it from Thy hand; I will bear it and bear it till death, as Thou hast laid it upon me. Oh God! if my life is to be long, let me live to bless and comfort". The flood comes and death, but it brings to Maggie a complete reconciliation with her world, and for one supreme moment the joy of childhood returns, as in the days when brother and sister "had clasped their little hands in love, and roamed the daisied fields together."

In connection with the ethics which this novel teaches so distinctly, many critics have condemned George Eliot for not following out the doctrine in her own life. Few, if any, are the people, competent to pass judgement on this subject. She was extremely reticent in speaking of her union with George Henry Lewes. We know that she considered it sacred and serious. From a letter written several years later, comes her statement, "If I live five years longer, the positive result of my existence on the side of truth and goodness, will out-weigh the small negative good that would

have consisted in my not doing anything to shock others, and I can conceive no consequences that will make me repent the past." She was satisfied that she was injuring no one by this action, and entered upon it with a moral conviction that it was right. In accordance with her liberal theories, this illegal marriage was consistent. As she judged her characters by their lights, she too, should be judged by her personal standards of morality.

To this period belongs her most artistic work, "Silas Marner," which is her only single-volume novel. The ethics are clearly brought out in the way of making the characters unconscious examples of right and wrong. It is a simple story of a weaver, who has been deceived and cheated by the world. In bitterness, he has turned away ^{from} all association with men, and has concentrated his ambitions to the hoarding of gold. The money disappeared, and in its place a little child came through the snow of a winter's night. Then, through his devotion to her, he was gradually brought to realize the value of love and fellow-feeling in the world. The author says that "in old days there were angels who came and took men by the hand, and led them away from the city of destruction. We see no white-winged angels now. But yet men are led away from threatening destruction;---- and the hand may be a little child's."

In Godfrey Cass, the real father of the child, is found an example of the law of retribution. He turned away a blessing in refusing to acknowledge her, and ~~he~~ fostered a deception so long, that the stern Nemesis would allow no restitution when he longed to make amends. This story gives George Eliot's idea of love;- a devotion to others, which means self-forgetfulness. It is simply another way of teaching that the value of life, lies in its dedication to the wel-



fare of others.

"Romola" marks a change in George Eliot's work. In her previous books, she had drawn for material from her girlhood memories. After this, beginning with Romola, she has deliberately and consciously sought for designs around which to form her stories, and in which to propagate her creed. The ethical interest in Romola centers around the two principal characters - the heroine, and Tito Melema. Although the story is a huge historical romance, a careful interpretation of Florentine life in the time of Savonarola, these things are subordinated to the psychological study of character. The text of the book might be given in the words of the scriptures; "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it." Tito Melema is a beautiful, fascinating young Greek, who follows the law of self-pleasing. With the love of ease and cowardly fear of pain, he is led to disregard the demands of Duty. Romola says of him, "I believe when I first knew him he never thought of anything cruel or base. But because he tried to slip away from everything that was unpleasant, and cared for nothing else so much as his own safety, he came at last to commit some of the basest deeds, - such as make men infamous." Little by little, this flaw in his nature leads him downward from weakness to treachery. He has no awe of "the divine Nemesis," but after his uneasy conscience is once quieted, he advances deeper and deeper in evil and crime. Punishment comes to him at last, but his selfishness and sin have involved many innocent persons in suffering. Romola, whose love and trust are destroyed by Tito's faithlessness, must struggle with the sorrow which he has caused her. She finds a refuge in Savonarola, - the zealous exponent of a new religion of humanity. She would leave her husband, and

chose a new, higher life, but her guide declares, "You are seeking some good other than the law you are bound to obey. --- I say again man cannot chose his duties. You may choose to forsake your duties, and choose not to have the sorrow they bring. But you will go forth; and what will you find, my daughter? Sorrow without duty; bitter herbs and no bread with them." He bids her take the crucifix as an emblem of a life given for the good of others; to follow its example and remain with her duties. Knowing the meaning of anguish, she should be eager to soothe the grief of others. When Savonarola forgets his own duty in his ambition for his party, and Romola loses faith in the one being in whom she had so trusted, she flees. Then she finds herself in a plague stricken town, where there is work for her to do. She regains her ideals, and returns with a faith pure and strong, to devote her life to helping others. In the end, she says. "We can only have the highest happiness --- by having much feeling for the rest of the world as well as ourselves." This story is a constant assertion that the only value and excellence of human life, lies in its pursuit of the truth, of right and of goodness to the exclusion of every meaner aim; and that the path of self-pleasing leads to utter abasement, and irreparable loss for mankind.

In Felix Holt, written some three years later, we feel distinctly that the artist is submerged in the preacher. The power of her intellect, the strenuous doctrines are still forcible, but the charm is in a great degree lost. A certain French critic, Edmond Scherer, has said, "Man is so made that he seeks for himself every where. Novels are an interpretation of the world and of life --- and of the eternal tragedy of the human heart". This can be said truly of the preceding novels of George Eliot, but in Felix Holt, the

characters are principally mouthpieces for her doctrines. She has created Felix in order that she may teach political and social ideas. He is a young working man, enthused with a zeal for elevating his comrades. He scorns selfish aims for personal advancement, preferring to devote his life to the men of his class. He champions a social reform, which is only to be gained, by each person living for the good of others. It is simply the application of the author's ethical theories to modern politics. There are a number of interesting characters in the story, who carry out the creed. Esther Lyons renounces a life of pleasure for the satisfaction of following highest ideals. Mrs. Transome is haunted by the Nemesis of a youthful sin, which makes her life a horror for years. These are the same ideas which have been more skillfully embodied in her former books.

Middlemarch, her next novel, is a huge panorama of English middle-class life, a painting of life, as George Eliot saw it. Her friend and critic, Frederick Harrison, calls it a "reiterated dissection of disagreeable anatomies." It appears to be a plotless story, a study in frustrated lives and lost ideals. Individuals with high ambitions, struggle with the blight of social conditions. The chief ethical interest lies in the development of Dorothea Brooke, Rosamond Vincy and Dr. Lydgate. Dorothea is a "dreaming girl in the modern world" longing to spend her life in service to others. She has visions of devoting herself to some helpless, genius, like the blind Milton. She accepts joyfully in marriage, a Mr. Casaubon, a warped old book-worm. Of course, her martyrdom proves a failure. Social conditions are too strong for her. She has sought for happiness in self-abnegation, not realizing its nearness to pain.

or its fullest meaning. Hers is a life of mistakes, but yet "the effect of her being, on those around her, was incalculably diffusive; for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts." It must be remembered that the author's theory is, that the individual's highest mission is a sacrifice of self to the race. George Eliot would say, that Dorothea's life was beautiful because it strove to fulfil the highest ideals. She makes us feel in contrast, the evil of such a life as Rosamond Vincy, ^{who was} a self-concentrated woman who never could comprehend anything adverse to her own wishes. By insisting on her selfish desires being granted, she causes the ruin of her husband, Lydgate, and the gradual surrender of his lofty ideals. He allows his love for this unworthy woman to overcome his ambitions. He gives up his aspirations to help mankind, and in so degenerating, brings a loss upon the world. The success of the individual, that is the gain of worldly goods, the story teaches is dross. The aim of life is to advance the race, all else is but a failure. This enormous picture of humanity, with its multiplicity of types of people, demonstrates how closely interwoven is human existence, and how necessary to it, is the brave individual. An expression of the spirit of this story is found in what she says of Dorothea, "the modern St. Theresa" viz: "her loving heart beats and sobs after an unattained goodness, tremble off and are dispersed among hindrances, instead of centering in some long recognizable deed."

"Daniel Deronda" is the last novel of this ethical teacher. In it she has championed the cause of Judaism, and given a sympathetic representation of its aims and purposes. Yet her art and her ethics suffer, from the making of the characters into mere

personified ideas. She has passed beyond the lines of her capacity. Unreal creations ruin the value of the story. Puppets are not worthy of teaching a moral. The faultless Jews repel, more than the sinful self indulgent Christians. Philosophy embodied in artificial characters, is worthless in a novel. The ethical ideas are as strong here, but their interpretation is much weaker, than in her former stories. Daniel Deronda is the example of a faultless individual, whose ideals are those of altruism and humanitarianism. He plays the part of a Savior to the weaker souls, preaching to them the doctrine of Duty, and their obligations of self-forgetfulness. Yet he is an unsuccessful creation. His absolute saintliness makes him a wearisome personage, and in his failure the doctrine is weakened. All the Jews in this story are unreal exponents of goodness in life. On the other hand, the life-like characters are those who are examples of the wrong way of living. Gwendolen Harleith, the young woman whose law is self, and who imagines she can make the world conform to her own wishes, leads a wilful, capricious existence. She is conscious of the power of her strange beauty, and uses it for her own advancement. Ambitious of social success, worldly and frivolous, she makes a loveless marriage to escape poverty. Then she finds in her husband, a nature cold and utterly lacking in a moral sense. He is another devotee of self, but one of crueller form. He delights to tyrannize over her, and under faultless manners, displays his calm villainy. He is the type of intellectual ^{ness} meanings. The girl who has intended to dominate finds a master, who blights all her impulses, and crushes her into helpless hatred. Daniel Deronda comes as a redeemer. He makes her realize her selfish sins, and teaches her to endure the irritating

life which she brought upon herself. She becomes outwardly resigned, but her heart is bitter. Then comes the death of her persecutor, but the fulfilment of her secret desire causes a wild remorse. This is the thing which saves her soul. The realization of her guilt brings the better self to life. Through anguish she must repay the fault, but this suffering shows her the path of duty, the life of self abnegation which is her redemption.

It cannot be denied that this system of ethics which George Eliot conceived is noble and elevating. She wished to lead men toward the perfection of a loftier religion than the one which her reason had rejected. As she said in a letter to Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe, "I believe that religion has to be modified,- "developed" according to the dominant phrase, and that a religion more perfect than any yet prevalent must express less care for personal consolation, and a more deeply owing sense of responsibility to man springing from sympathy with that which of all things is most certainly known to us, the difficulty of the human lot." The main defect in this code of hers is its manifest hopelessness. Instead of creating a feeling of eager self-renunciation, her books leave an impression of gloom and despair. An immutable law shapes the lives of her characters. "Our life is determined for us," she explains. We should "give up wishing and only think of bearing what is laid upon us, and doing what is given us to do." The progress of humanity can only be made through hopeful men. Deprive a man of hope, tell him he must bear his burden (which may never be lighter,) because it is right he should, he becomes unwilling and incompetent, from pure discouragement. George Eliot's theory of blotting out one's individuality and living for others is ably refuted by the critic Mr. Stopford Brooke. He says,



"when sacrifice of self is made in its last effort equivalent to the sacrifice of individuality, the doctrine of self-renunciation is driven to a vicious extreme. It is not self-sacrifice which is then demanded, it is suicide." This system of ethics is impracticable. All natures are not noble or capable of such unselfishness as she preaches. Those who are, would be uselessly destroyed, and not a better, but a weaker generation would exist. George Eliot's theories do not furnish the necessary incentive for man's development. Faith in a happy hereafter, and fear of future punishment, seem to be required for the ordinary individual. With personal annihilation as the end of existence, man is more liable to lose his high ideals, shirk responsibilities, and turn towards his own selfish pleasures.

However defective this creed, she was a great moral teacher in that she made clearer and prominent several important facts. As the early nineteenth century had exaggerated the value of idealism, and emphasized the mystical side of life, so later this school of Positivists, of which George Eliot is the exponent, came as a reaction rejecting everything but the truth as known by human experience. In accordance with the philosophic theories of such men as Comte and Spencer, she accepted as a vital principle their idea of heredity. She believed that feeling is the essential expression of life, and sympathized with religion if it satisfied the soul's craving for faith. She insisted on an individual standard of judgement since conscience is the result of inherited intuitions. The inevitable law of consequences, she taught very clearly. One of the best expressions of her convictions is given by one of her friends.¹ He says - "I remember how at Cambridge, I walked with her once in the

¹ F. W. H. Myers. The Century Magazine, Nov. 1881.

Fellows' Garden, of Trinity, on an evening of rainy May; and she, stirred somewhat beyond her wont, and taking as her text the three words which have been used so often as the inspiring trumpet-calls of man, - the words God, Immortality, Duty, - pronounced with terrible emphasis, how inconceivable was the first, how unbelievable the second, and yet how peremptory and absolute the third. This ethical creed of George Eliot's cannot attract many followers, or gain a wider acceptance, but it is of value for its place in the progress of scientific and religious thought in the nineteenth century. For herself the ideal has been realized. She has joined the

"Choir invisible

Of those immortal dead who live again

In Minds made better by their presence."

Her worth has been well estimated by Mr. Frederick Harrison when he says, "By virtue of her spiritual conception of her art, she points the way to a type far greater than she reached herself, - even greater than any which has gone before."





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